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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 1, 2004

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The Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420-0002

Dear Secretary Principi:

As you review the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission's report delivered to you on February 13, 2004, there are a number of concerns I have that I hope you will address.

While I am encouraged by the CARES Commission's goal of improving veterans' services and your assurance that changes in the VA infrastructure are essential to make sure no veterans fall through the cracks, the closure of the Brecksville facility presents a number of challenges in maintaining the quality of care veterans receive in northeast Ohio.

I am particularly concerned about Brecksville's innovative programs and services for homeless veterans and veterans with severe mental illness. Will the VA maintain the nationally recognized programs offered at Brecksville? How will the VA maintain the capacity of their specialized mental health programs? Will the number of beds and services at Brecksville for psychiatric patients and homeless veterans with mental health and drug issues be maintained? The Brecksville Hospital has the only domiciliary beds in the Louis Stokes VA Health System. Will the same number of beds be available at the Wade Park facility?

VA is also required to maintain long-term care capacity at the level that existed in 1998. Does the VA intend to transfer all of the nursing homes capacity that exists at Brecksville to the Wade Park facility?

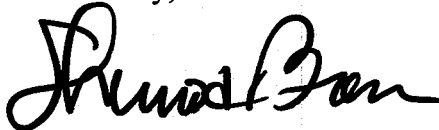
The commission's report says the VA should consider using vacant space to provide supportive services to homeless veterans. Will the VA consider this recommendation? If so, what details can you provide that support its inception?

The report says the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) should be able to address capacity issues by establishing new sites of care, provided the VISN has resources to do so. Can the VA guarantee the resources necessary to develop these new sites of care before the current sites are closed?

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these questions. I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss these issues before your final recommendation is released. My scheduler will call your office to discuss a time that is convenient. Members of the Ohio delegation, including Representatives Tim Ryan and Ted Strickland, have expressed interest in attending this meeting as well.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sherrod Brown", written in a cursive style.

SHERROD BROWN
Member of Congress